

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1, 2, 4, and 5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Komatsu et al., JP 60052533 A, in view of Noda et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,009,707, Fujimoto et al., U.S. Patent No. 4,871,393, and Feichtner et al., U.S. Patent No. 4,410,355. Reconsideration of the rejection is respectfully requested.

In support of the rejection, the Examiner contends that, “Komatsu does not specifically teach that some of the returned sintered material is added ‘within a longitudinal extent of a granulation drum’ during the granulation process. Noda teaches a method for manufacturing agglomerates of sintered pellets, wherein agglomerates of less than 4 mm in particle size are returned to the primary disk pelletizer and repeatedly pelletized (col. 3, lines 23-27). Noda also teaches that the returns are fed directly into the pelletizer (Fig. 1). It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to add the returned ore of Komatsu directly into the pelletizer, as taught by Noda, because it is a known method of returning ‘unfinished’ product to a pelletizer,” (Office Action, page 3, lines 7-16).

Applicants respectfully disagree with the analysis of the Examiner.

First, it should be noted that column 3, lines 23-27, of Noda et al. refer to primary agglomerates of less than 4 mm in particle size being returned to the primary disk pelletizer 8 and repeatedly pelletized, the primary agglomerates being pelletized by the primary disk pelletizer 8 before being sieved with screen 9a of 4 mm in mesh. Thus, all the cited portion of Noda et al. teaches is the return of pelletized particles of a certain particle size repeatedly to a pelletizer that pelletized them. It is respectfully submitted that this portion of Noda et al. does not teach, disclose, or suggest the addition of “at least some of the returned sintered material within a longitudinal extent of a granulation drum during the granulation process,” (emphasis supplied), as required by independent claim 1.

Second, even if the Examiner contends that the returned sintered material in Noda et al. is actually the “return fines of less than 4 mm in particle size in bin 5,” (column 3, lines 15-16), those return fines are apparently mixed with other materials in element 7, which appears to be a mixer, before being pelletized in primary disk pelletizer 8, (column 3, lines 13-23; Fig. 1). Thus, even if the Examiner contends that the return fines are in bin 5, those return fines are not added to the longitudinal extent of pelletizer 8, which the Examiner presumably contends is the equivalent in Noda et al. of the granulation drum of independent claim 1, during a pelletizing or granulation process, as required by independent claim 1. Instead, the return fines in bin 5 are mixed with “[c]oarse particle iron ore in bins 1 and 2, fine pellet feed in bin 3, serpentine as flux in bin 4, ... and burnt lime as a

binder in bin 6," (column 3, lines 13-16), by presumed mixer 7 and only such mixture is fed to primary disk pelletizer 8, (see Fig. 1).

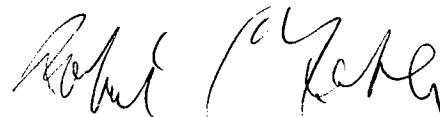
Since each of claims 2, 4, and 5 is directly dependent upon independent claim 1, each of claims 2, 4, and 5 is allowable for at least the same reasons recited above with respect to the allowability of independent claim 1.

In view of the foregoing remarks, allowance of claims 1, 2, 4, and 5 is respectfully requested, claims 7-16 being withdrawn from consideration.

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THROUGH THE PATENT AND
TRADEMARK OFFICE EFS FILING
SYSTEM ON June 30, 2009.

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Respectfully submitted,



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